



# **SOUTHWEST BORDER ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING ALLIANCE**

*by* Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

DEADLY VIOLENCE FROM DRUG CARTELS AND transnational gangs in Mexico poses an increasingly dangerous threat to Texas communities – particularly those along the 1,254-mile Texas/Mexico border. At the heart of the violence is not only human smuggling, narcotics and weapons, but also currency. Drug cartels are fighting for control over the lucrative trade corridors they need to transport their contraband.

Unfortunately, the United States is a top destination point for illegal drugs. Whether the narcotics are produced in Mexico or just shipped from there, rivaling drug trafficking organizations generate enormous profits from their illicit sales. And for a variety of reasons, they largely rely upon cash. For the cartels to fund their violent battles, they must be able to collect, consolidate and launder currency into forms that avoid confiscation by law enforcement.

By identifying, preventing and reducing money laundering, law enforcement can strike at the very heart of the cartels' illicit profits – which is why the Texas Attorney General's Office is working with the Southwest Border Anti-Money Laundering Alliance. The Alliance was created in February 2010 to help Texas and other Border States work cooperatively on money laundering prevention, investigation and prosecution.

The Alliance is the product of two agreements – one with Western Union Financial Services, Inc., and the other with the States of Arizona, California and New Mexico – that established new protocols for sharing Western Union's extensive information about border-area wire transfers. In addition to providing certain person-to-person money transfer data to law enforcement, the agreements created the Southwest Border Anti-Money

Laundering Alliance itself. They also provided that Texas law enforcement agencies are eligible to apply for grants from a \$50 million multi-state border crime prevention fund.

The Texas Attorney General's Office is currently developing plans to seek grant funding for both human trafficking and money laundering prevention from the border crime prevention fund. If the agency's application is approved, the one-time funds would be used to enhance programs to disrupt Mexican drug cartels' money laundering and trafficking operations – and will additionally help provide human trafficking prevention training opportunities for law enforcement.

The Texas Attorney General's Office has a long history of combating financial crimes – with a special emphasis on money laundering by criminal enterprises. Texas law enforcement agencies may contact the Texas Attorney

General's Office to obtain access to the person-to-person money transfer data that was provided under the terms of the Alliance agreement. In the long tradition of the Attorney General's Office, we stand ready to assist Texas law enforcement or prosecutors in the fight against Mexican drug cartels and their financial underpinnings.

Once narcotics trafficking is less profitable and law enforcement successfully interrupts the cartels' access to cash, drug traffickers' ability to sustain their criminal enterprise will be diminished. So Texas and other Border States – through the Southwest Border Anti-Money Laundering Alliance – are joining forces and working cooperatively to crack down on money laundering. Together, we are committed to fighting the criminal cartels that plague our southern border.

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